

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1329

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 9904

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PROG, SEDU, CO

SUBJECT: LOPEZ ANNOUNCES COLOMBIAN INTENTION TO TAKE OVER SUMMER
INSTITUTE OF LINGUISTICS OPERATION.

REF: BOGOTA 6132

1. PRESIDENT LOPEZ ON OCT 13 STATED THAT THE GOC PLANS A GRADUAL
TAKE-OVER BY COLOMBIAN PERSONNEL OF THE OPERATIONS OF THE SUMMER
INSTITUTE OF LINGUISTICS (SIL). LOPEZ MADE THE ANNOUNCEMENT DURING A
VISIT BY HIS CABINET AND HIMSELF TO THE TOWN OF MITU, NEAR THE
BRAZILIAN BORDER. THE SPARSE POPULATION OF THAT REGION IS PRE-
DOMINANTLY INDIAN.

2. THE SIL, A SUBSIDIARY OF WYCLIFFE BIBLE TRANSLATORS, INC HAS BEEN
THE SUBJECT OF SPASMODIC CRITICISM IN THE BOGOTA PRESS DURING THE
PAST SEVERAL MONTHS. IN ADDITION, GENERAL MATALLANA, HEAD OF THE
NATIONAL SECURITY POLICE AND FORMER ARMY COMMANDER HAS, FOR
SEVERAL YEARS, SHOWN A DEEP DISTRUST OF THE SIL'S VARIOUS ACTIVITIES.

3. THE EVANGELICAL VOLUNTEER GROUP, WHICH WORKS ON CODIFICATION OF
TRIBAL LANGUAGES, RUNS LITERACY PROGRAMS AND TEACHES AGRICULTURAL
TECHNIQUES TO THOSE INDIAN TRIBES THAT ARE JUST BEGINNING TO FEEL
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THE IMPACT OF CIVILIZATION HAS BEEN CRITICIZED ON A NUMBER OF

GROUND, SOME CRITICS HAVE CHARGED THEM WITH SMUGGLING ACTIVITIES AND EXPLOITATION OF THE INDIANS. NONE OF THESE CHARGES HAVE BEEN SUBSTANTIATED. OTHER CHARGES INCLUDE THAT OF BEING A CIA FRONT. THERE HAS ALSO BEEN CRITICISM OF THE QUALITY AND SCIENTIFIC VALUE OF THE SIL LANGUAGE PROGRAMS.

4. THE EXTANT (1962) SIL AGREEMENT WITH THE COLOMBIAN GOVERNMENT CALLS FOR SAID AGREEMENT TO REMAIN IN FORCE UNTIL THE GOC SHOULD GIVE ONE YEAR'S NOTICE OF INTENTION TO TERMINATE (BOGOTA 6132). SIL HAS BEEN NEGOTIATING A NEW AGREEMENT WITH THE GOC. INSTITUTE OFFICIALS, HOWEVER, HAD NOT BEEN SANGUINE ABOUT THE PROSPECTS OF OBTAINING A NEW AGREEMENT WHILE THEY WERE RECEIVING ATTENTION FROM THE LOCAL PRESS.

5. SIL SPOKESMAN WILLIAM NYMAN TOLD EMBASSY OFFICER THAT HE SAW NOTHING TO OBJECT TO IN THE LOPEZ STATEMENT. THE PRESIDENT ANNOUNCED PLAN, NYMAN, SAID, WAS SIMILAR TO THE PROVISIONS OF THE PROPOSED NEW SIL-GOC AGREEMENT (AND SIMILAR TO SIL OPERATING AGREEMENTS IN OTHER COUNTRIES). NYMAN POINTED OUT THAT LOPEZ HAD SET NO TIME LIMIT FOR THE COLOMBIAN TAKE OVER. NYMAN, HOWEVER, WAS LESS SANGUINE ON THE OUTLOOK FOR FUTURE PRESS TREATMENT OF THE SIL.

6. THE COLOMBIAN CONGRESS IS SCHEDULED TO DISCUSS THE SIL PROGRAM ON THE EVENING OF OCT 14. THE LOPEZ STATEMENT MAY HAVE TAKEN THE ISSUE AWAY FROM SOME OF SIL'S CONGRESSIONAL CRITICS. IN ADDITION, NYMAN SAYS THAT MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT CORNELIO REYES HAS SAID THE HE WOULD SPEAK ON BEHALF OF THE SIL PROGRAMS.

7. COMMENT: THE LOPEZ APPROACH GIVES THE APPEARANCE OF A UNILATERAL GOC DECISION, WHILE IN EFFECT IMPLEMENTING THE BASIC TERMS OF THE LONG-STANDING PROPOSAL FOR A NEW GOVERNMENT AGREEMENT WITH THE SIL. THE PRESIDENT'S ACTION WILL, WE BELIEVE, EVENTUALLY PROVE AN EFFECTIVE WAY OF REMOVING THE TROUBLESOME SIL QUESTION FROM THE PUBLIC EYE.

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